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ABSTRACT

A number of faulty assumptions about women cloud the real issues facing families who need child care in the 1980s. Until we can isolate the child care issues and discard the emotional underpinnings of women's status, child care cannot become a recognized profession. The first section of this paper focuses on assumptions about women's roles. Problems specific to child care professionals are highlighted in the second section, and finally, in the third section, a point-by-point challenge is issued to individuals, groups, and networks concerned about the future of day care. (Author)

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PROFESSIONALIZING DAY CARE - NEW DIRECTIONS

BY

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PROFESSIONALIZING DAY CARE - NEW DIRECTIONS*

by

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A number of faulty assumptions about women cloud the real issues facing families and children who need child care in the 80's. Until we can isolate the child care issues and discard the emotional underpinnings of women's status, child care cannot become a recognized profession.

The first section of this paper focuses on these underpinnings. Problems specific to child care are highlighted in the second section. Finally, in the third section, a point-by-point challenge is issued to individuals, groups, and networks concerned about the future of day care.

Some Facts about Women's Status

1. Women historically under-estimate their value as educators of young children.

Consider the exodus of women from their homes when business and popular monthly magazines affixed an hourly wage to the services of wives and mothers. Women accepted the less-than-one-dollar-per-hour quote. They were untrained in the subversive tactics of media propaganda, and they were untrained in economics and accounting. They failed to evaluate the real contribution

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being made to their families by their at-home labor. They surrendered what had been pride in quality tasks done for their families and became members of the 9-to-5 crowd.

2. Working women face one common obstacle in today's marketplace - inadequate pay for their services.

The doors women entered for a bigger paycheck led to service fields. To escape the deplorable stalemate of perpetual servitude, women entered education, nursing, and secretarial occupations.

Service professions and occupations are viewed in the business world as expenses. Service related jobs usually demand minimum pay. The jobs themselves are dead-ended in that they rarely lead to management positions. So it's hardly surprising that occupations women chose to enter, while stimulating, have not done much to help them achieve a status greater than that of housewife.

Today the purchasing power of working mothers for child care services is greatly limited as a result of the occupations women chose. Child care fees are measured against the earning power of the working mother. That perceived cost is even used by federal programs, which continues to reinforce the caregiver's low self esteem.

3. Women feel compelled to be super wives, super moms, and super in their careers.

The male focuses his attention on establishing the game plan for business. As a result, the policy decisions about the family are delegated to women. Women are daily bombarded with

messages for more efficiently and effectively functioning in their personal, professional, and managerial roles. Guilt burdens many women who find they cannot compete in all three domains as super women. An additional cross for women continues to be society's inability to mobilize around a common belief about women's place in any of their multiple responsibilities.

4. Women remain closed to networking to achieve common goals.

While men are taught team cohesiveness in winning a game from a tender age, women are taught to complete tasks alone and to maintain the results. Those styles of approaching problems continues to influence the way men and women make policy decisions as individuals and teams.

In summary, the facts that influence the status of women in today's society hinder better conditions for child care. It is my opinion that until we tolerate the differing needs of women and families in this culture, day care options will continue to be in the throes of conflict.

Problems for Child Care Professionals

Before the industrial society, child care was a family affair. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, fathers and male household members began to spend ten and twelve hours a day at the marketplace. This was true whether the fathers were corporate executives or factory workers. Pressed by outside work demands, men delegated child care decisions to the female member of the household. Rightly or wrongly, they

believed that mothers could and would make optimal decisions about their children's care.

When the male executive of the industrial regime had to call on women to man the machines in World War II, nurseries were planned for the children in close proximity to their mothers. Professionals were secured to design and staff the nursery environment. United in patriotism, and a common belief about children and women, the needs of the children became important factors indeed. Following the victory of that war, the nurseries were dismantled. The children presumably returned home with their mothers. Males returned to their pre-war careers or entered educational programs. Women however, moved from their war production jobs to peacetime productions. A large majority did not return to maintain the family economy in the pre-war manner. Some of them remained in the work world by necessity. Father absence due to death, divorce, missing-in-action or prisoner of war were realities faced by many.

The story of those involved in child care is not much different from the exercise in which women as a group have been engaged. Witness the crippling cycle of women's struggles which becomes the trappings around child care services as we enter the 80's. As with the issues related to women I want to underscore point-by-point the problems of child care professionals.

1. Women judge the fair price for child care against their singular income.

The dollar value for the woman's service to the family by staying at home was popularized as a slight percentage of

the father's income. Mothers, as a group, consequently judged what part of their net income should be spent for child care in like fashion. A dangerous assumption -- that the care of young children required no more than a sixth-grade education -- began to prevail. Only the most astute perceived the struggle that the family would perpetuate by the handicaps of impoverished and changing relationships inherent in placing children in a setting outside the home.

Today's child is a victim of deference to the income power of the female household member. The strategy in this war is no less important to individual freedom than that strategy that led to victory during World War II. Simply stated: Child care is caught in the crossfire, first, the female depreciation of her creative role as the first educator of the child, and secondly, the long-accepted myth that the mother is and ought to be the primary care-giver. Life is created by the union of males and females. The responsibility must be approached rationally and must be shared. Women continue to make decisions that prevent formation of a solid substructure of intelligence and behavior in those first six years. Men, by delegation of their responsibility, perpetuate the low status of children in our society.

2. Degreed or non-degreed, experienced or inexperienced, those in early childhood education start at a similar base pay.

How long will the professionally-trained and degreed educator of young children struggle with overcoming the hurdles? Money is the way Americans measure the success of work performance.

How we get the money equivalent to the task performed is primary to other areas of focus before us. Only with better monetary rewards will we attract and retain a dedicated staff of educators for young children.

It seems to me that there is an enlarging threat to education in general -- the idea that education is a benefit to the individual and not to the society of which we are members. If the American taxpayer objects to taxation for education of others, public funds for programs for the preschool-aged child may vanish from the list of possible sources for income. Inflation is already forcing wage freezes. A twenty-four percent across-the-board utility increase this month in one American community is culprit for the elimination of several positions in social agencies. As groups clamor for reduced taxes - and who among us wouldn't prefer lower taxes - government will be forced to respond. For early childhood education to be competitive for those existing funds, we must keep the goal of serving children in perspective and yet acknowledge the salary needs of professional teachers of young children.

One small federal tax benefit to parents is the child care tax credit. This program encourages parents choice regarding an appropriate learning environment for their young child. Is this program to be lost? Title XX and the Department of Agriculture Food Program are already shaken with attacks for reform and reduction. Head Start has fallen suspect to the axe of funding cuts.

To operate on private fees that cover the cost of even the basic early childhood program dictates that the administration

barely pay minimum wage. Building an adequate operating budget becomes a demanding public relations task. Our deserved wage, however, must be claimed. When we accept the developmental responsibility of the young child, we do not accept the chains of servitude. A poverty-level of existence is equitable for neither the mother of children nor the child care professional.

3. There is no differential in staff selection.

This important problem in child care perpetuates the public image that anyone with a sixth-grade education can meet the needs of the preschool child. Additionally, the practice demoralizes the entering graduate. There is no visible mobility within the field, no recognized training program, no apparent curriculum, and no defined method for evaluation of performance. Without some structure to the workplace, the adult inter-relationships become an exploitation of woman power with little stimulation to improve.

Until we can develop a national model and delivery system that demonstrates educational value, day care will remain a babysitting service.

There is an advantage for staff and children where the persons in charge are knowledgeable in early childhood and where levels of expertise among the staff are recognized by a difference in title and pay. There must be an effort to develop skilled teachers for the jobs. Job titles, job descriptions, and wage differentials provide support to the delicate dream of making early childhood field a career. When job entry is voluntary and there is no effort to increase each day's importance as a member of the team, staff become apathetic.

With little training in management, women move into child care not knowing how to build a team spirit or a team effort toward excellence. The vision is short-term, one year at a time. To build an internal mechanism that stimulates personal competence and gives zest to the prospects of remaining in early childhood requires a different approach to the organization of programs. Small center-based and home-based programs may need to become units of larger entities. Networks increase the power to demand better pay, to determine the players involved, to plan strategies that will remove the stigma for those involved in child care. The value to the general public will be to erase the confusion that now exists and to raise the awareness of the skills and contributions of professional educators to the lives of children from infancy.

Recently I wrote an article for Pi Lambda Theta bemoaning the fate of professionally trained teachers functioning at the same level with non-trained staff. Most frequently the greatest number in a given staff are those with little or no educational background for working with young children. Not long after the article appeared I received a letter from Pennsylvania written by a woman in her 30's with a degree in early childhood; she had made a fast exit from a federally-funded day care program because activities were not planned with the individual needs of the children in mind.

Last month a young college graduate who is beginning her second year of teaching in an Oklahoma preschool program came to my office. She had just switched from the daycare option of a church sponsored program to the nursery school program at the same church. She had been the only professionally trained member

of the day care staff. The co-workers only laughed at her efforts to provide a quality learning environment. Though all the staff attended required workshops, the attitude remained custodial. As the nursery school teacher she will earn the same money in three mornings that she was earning in five full workdays in the day care setting.

4. Labels are a hinderance in professionalizing day care.

The terms day care home, nursery school, day care center, Head Start, Montessori, etc., carry hidden meanings that diminish the message that "all" children have developmental health, behavior, intelligence, and motor needs. We have sold the American public a status product. Until we believe that children are learners from birth with a need for a balanced approach to their total development, we limit the contribution that we can make as professionals.

Current child care ghettos insult the American belief of individual right to a public education for all which in turn benefits all society.

The dream that education can assist in achieving one's maximum potential is now being eroded in the first years of life. The question becomes: Can we recover from our fumble? Will male household members, male legislators, and male corporate executives pick up the mantle? Will they become partners in policy decisions regarding the child care needs of our society? Will the masculine characteristics that have heralded men the "protectors and providers" of families provoke assertive and definite strategies for alleviating the jeopardy to children?

Will we be able to structure positive and nurturing environments? Timing is critical.

The inconsistencies of legislative bodies governing regulations for the environment of the child outside his home contribute significantly to the widespread confusion. In some states, church-operated programs are exempt from regulations. Another state may have different government agencies supervising programs for young children. Inconsistencies create big gaps where children become lost pawns. One accomplishment of our network must be to develop standard regulations. Every child, regardless of state of residence, must be seen as having the same rights to protection and education from birth.

Children are in programs part of the day, a greater part of the day, or for twenty-four hour periods of time. A child's needs are individual but common to other children. Whether a program is center-based or home-based, it should respond to the needs of the individual child. Children have a right to membership in our system of individual protection.

Implications

Each woman must know what is right for her in the eyes of her Creator and her Savior. Just because a woman does not have a career does not mean she is at home. Women will be found bowling, playing bridge, doing volunteer work, etc. Child care is one of the biggest problems of all women today. Yet, amazingly, we do not have a single philosophy about the place of women and the children in our society today. The implications for us, then, are to support a national strategy that will:

1. Assist women in becoming competent and confident

in the roles they choose for themselves.

2. Foster the maximum development of children in intellectual, physical, and moral spheres, whatever child care choice is made.
3. Assure up-graded pay and benefits for professionally-trained early childhood educators.

I have repeatedly said a "national" strategy. This nation was founded by a network believing 1) in the right to worship God above the State and 2) in the right of representation in taxation. The right to worship God is a private matter which affects the individual family. We continue to defend that early victory to worship God in this country as citizens and as taxpayers. The rights of women to representation in the use of taxes must also be defended.

Let's set our sights on a goal! It was the Boston Tea Party that dramatized the united emotions in the phrase, "No taxation without representation." Child care is a corporate conglomerate primarily made up of women board members of women caregivers, and of working mothers. We do not have to wait for a crisis to put our sights on a national strategy.

Let me clarify. A national strategy does not have to be a federal strategy! The British did not surrender until the battle lines were dramatically drawn.

Women and men can become the catalyst for a national policy that I would call the National Childhood Opportunity Plan. The Platform I would present for such a Plan includes these provisions:

1. Living and learning environments for young children that meet an adopted set of minimum regulations.

Administrators of cottage and center-based programs, alike, must adhere to these regulations. Enforcement will be up to the individual administrator. We should boycott those boards that will not support the Plan.

2. A minimum salary level for beginning early childhood professionals, with appropriate salary increases as they advance. We should begin immediately to make fee changes that call for recognition of the skills of the staff involved. We should boycott those programs that are not structured to meet the needs of the child in a way that has communicated its contributions to the lives of children in the community. We should begin programs in cottages that serve children and that will be rewarded with professional salaries.
3. A national training program. Make this first conference in Day Care Administration, with its college credit option, a catalyst for an annual training program by the National Childhood Opportunity Plan.
4. A commitment to the Plan. Let us become female mentors for future early childhood educators by refusing to be party to no less than points 1, 2, 3 of the National Childhood Opportunity Plan, thereby awakening our sisterhood to the need to act to raise women's status.

Can you picture the consequence of a national boycott by child care givers who would only work 1) where minimal national standards are met, 2) where pay was commensurate with training and experience and 3) where every staff member was in an annual training program.

I urge you to become committed to enforcing this Plan within your own sphere of influence. Get in the game, united in action, we can win the battle for better status for women, better conditions for child care workers, and a sounder education from infancy for our nation's children.